

The Belgic Confession: The Faith Sealed in Blood **The Three Forms of Unity: Session 3**

<https://threeforms.org/the-belgic-confession/>

In scripture, we see the importance of holding a “pattern of sound words.”
II Timothy 1:13, 2:1-2, 2:11-13, I Timothy 3:16

As new challenges and heresies attacked the church, it became necessary for the church to confess the truth with extra clarity.

-We all say that we believe the Bible, but what does that mean?

-ex: Arius said he believed the Bible but he distorted the Trinity and worshipped a different god than the true God of the Bible. The Nicene Creed was a way of safeguarding the true teaching of the Bible without going too far.

Can you think of other examples where guardrails would be helpful for Christians as they seek to confess the truth of God’s Word?

The Belgic Confession (1561) (translated from the French)- **Guido de Brès**, minister in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Belgium and the Netherlands were “the Lowlands”).

-The Reformed Christians were being abused by the Roman Catholic government and lumped in with the “Anabaptists.”

-Anabaptists were not like modern Baptists or Pacifists; they were fanatics that were seen on the level of modern-day terrorists. Ex: Münster Rebellion (1534)

-Unlike many other Confessions of Faith, the Belgic is not simply written as though it were a deposit of truth, but it is written to persuade the reader of the truth and the good faith of those who confess it.

i.e.- “we are good citizens and hold to the historic Christian faith,” for example, it cites the three Ecumenical Creeds and has lengthy treatments on the Trinity.

-It also explicitly calls out the bad behavior and doctrines of groups who are not good citizens or practicing historic Christianity. See Articles 9 and 36.

-The year after the confession was written, a copy was sent to King Philip II, together with an address in which the petitioners declared that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that they would “offer their backs to the stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire,” rather than deny the truth expressed in this confession. In 1567, Guido de Brès suffered the kind of martyr’s death he had described.

-When might it be helpful for the Church to petition the Government in this way?

Article 22: *The Righteousness of Faith*

We believe that for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith that embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, and makes him its own, and no longer looks for anything apart from him. For it must necessarily follow that either all that is required for our salvation is not in Christ or, if all is in him, then he who has Christ by faith has his salvation entirely.

Therefore, to say that Christ is not enough but that something else is needed as well is a most enormous blasphemy against God— for it then would follow that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior. And therefore we justly say with Paul that we are justified “by faith alone” or by faith “apart from works.”⁵⁴ However, we do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us— for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness. But Jesus Christ is our righteousness crediting to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits. When those benefits are made ours they are more than enough to absolve us of our sins.

Article 23: *The Justification of Sinners*

We believe that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ, and that in it our righteousness before God is contained, as David and Paul teach us when they declare that man blessed to whom God grants righteousness apart from works.⁵⁵ And the same apostle says that we are justified “freely” or “by grace” through redemption in Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ And therefore we cling to this foundation, which is firm forever, giving all glory to God, humbling ourselves, and recognizing ourselves as we are; not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits and leaning and resting only on the obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in him. That is enough to cover all our sins and to make us confident, freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror of God’s approach, without doing what our first father, Adam, did, who trembled as he tried to cover himself with fig leaves. In fact, if we had to appear before God relying— no matter how little— on ourselves or some other creature, then, alas, we would be swallowed up. Therefore everyone must say with David: “Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servants, for before you no living person shall be justified.”⁵⁷

WCF: CHAPTER 11 *Of Justification*

1. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

2. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

3. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father’s justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of

free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

4. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.

5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

6. The justification of believers under the old testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the new testament.

Article 24: *The Sanctification of Sinners*

We believe that this true faith, produced in man by the hearing of God's Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a "new man,"⁵⁸ causing him to live the "new life"⁵⁹ and freeing him from the slavery of sin.

Therefore, far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them that apart from it they will never do a thing out of love for God but only out of love for themselves and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls "faith working through love,"⁶⁰ which leads a man to do of himself the works that God has commanded in his Word.

These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by his grace. Yet they do not count toward our justification— for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works. Otherwise they could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place. So then, we do good works, but not for merit— for what would we merit?

Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not he to us, since it is he who "works in us both to will and do according to his good pleasure"⁶¹— thus keeping in mind what is written: "When you have done all that is commanded you, then you shall say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have done what it was our duty to do.'"⁶² Yet we do not wish to deny that God rewards good works— but it is by his grace that he crowns his gifts.

Moreover, although we do good works we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment. And even if we could point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work. So we would always be in doubt, tossed back and forth without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly if they did not rest on the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior.⁵⁸ [2 Cor. 5:17](#)^L

⁵⁹ [Rom. 6:4](#)^L ⁶⁰ [Gal. 5:6](#)^L ⁶¹ [Phil. 2:13](#)^L ⁶² [Luke 17:10](#)^L